

Thomas Jefferson to Joseph-Mathias Gerard de Rayneval, March 20, 1801, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO JOSEPH MATHIAS GÉRARD DE RAYNEVAL J. MSS.

Washington, Mar 20, 1801.

Dear Sir, —Mr. Pichon, who arrived two days ago, delivered me your favor of Jan 1, and I had before received one by Mr. Dupont, dated Aug 24, 99, both on the subject of lands, claimed on behalf of your brother, Mr. Gerard, and that of Aug 24, containing a statement of the case. I had verbally explained to Mr. Dupont, at the time, what I presumed to have been the case, which must, I believe, be very much mistaken in the statement sent with that letter; and I expected he had communicated it to you.

During the regal government, two companies, called the Loyal & the Ohio companies, had obtained grants from the crown for 800,000, or 1,000,000 of acres of land, each, on the Ohio, on condition of settling them in a given number of years. They surveyed some, & settled them; but the war of 1755 came on, & broke up the settlements. After it was over, they petitioned for a renewal. Four other large companies then formed themselves, called the Mississippi, the Illinois, the Wabash, & the Indiana companies, each praying for immense quantities of land, some amounting to 200 miles square; so that they proposed to cover the whole country north between the Ohio & Mississippi, & a great portion of what is south. All these petitions were depending, without any answer whatever from the crown, when the Revolution war broke out. The petitioners had associated to themselves some of the nobility of England, & most of the characters in America of great influence. When Congress assumed the government, they took some of their body in as partners, to obtain

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their influence; and I remembered to have heard, at the time, that one of them took Mr. Gerard as a partner, expecting by that to obtain the influence of the French court, to obtain grants of those lands which they had not been able to obtain from the British government. All these lands were within the limits of Virginia and that State determined, peremptorily, that they never should be granted to large companies, but left open equally to all; and when they passed their land law, (which I think was in 1778,) they confirmed only so much of the lands of the Loyal company as they had actually surveyed, which was a

very small proportion, and annulled every other pretension. And when that State conveyed the lands to Congress, (which was not till 1784,) so determined were they to prevent their being granted to these or any other large companies, that they made it an express condition of the cession, that they should be applied first towards the soldiers' bounties, and the residue sold for the payment of the national debt and for no other purpose. This disposition has been, accordingly, rigorously made, and is still going on; and Congress considers itself as having no authority to dispose of them otherwise.

I will particularly note the errors in the statement of Aug 99. It says the Congress granted to the Wabash company the lands on that river dividing them into 82 lots. Congress never meddled with them (much less granted them) till after the cession of Virginia. The company consisted perhaps of 80. persons, and of course the lands if they had been obtained, would have been divided into so many lots. It says "again made this grant direct as a proof of their esteem &c." Mr. Gerard left this country in 1779. The cession of lands by Virginia to Congress was not till 1784. It says that this intention of Congress was submitted to Lewis XVI. who [*faded*] his minister to accept it. I believe the fact was that when the Wabash company proposed to associate Mr. Gerard as a partner, he thought it necessary first to ask leave from his sovereign who gave his assent. But in all this transaction Congress had nothing to do & meddled not.

I sincerely wish, Sir, it had been in my power to have given you a more agreeable account of this claim. But as the case actually is, the most substantial service is to state it exactly,

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and not to foster false expectations. I remember with great sensibility all the attentions you were so good as to render me while I resided in Paris, and shall be made happy by every occasion which can be given me of acknowledging them; and the expressions of your friendly recollection are particularly soothing to me.